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## Viewing cable 09PORTAUPRINCE575, DECONSTRUCTING PREVAL

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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**#09PORTAUPRINCE575.**

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
<a href="#">09PORTAUPRINCE575</a>	<a href="#">2009-06-16 18:02</a>	<a href="#">2011-08-30 01:44</a>	<a href="#">CONFIDENTIAL</a>	<a href="#">Embassy Port Au Prince</a>

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Summary and Introduction  
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¶1. (C) Haitian President Rene Preval has now completed three years of his five year presidential mandate. Widely touted as the "transitional president" poised to lead Haiti into a new era of democracy and economic prosperity, he has had only modest success thus far. Haiti's problems are indeed daunting, and redressing them will take much more than a five-year term. However, Preval's particular world view, his personality and often indecisive and uncommunicative leadership style, coupled with Haiti's deeply divided political class and the devastating events of 2008, have conspired to defer, if not derail, forward movement here.

¶2. (C) That being said, Preval remains Haiti's indispensable man. Legitimately elected, still moderately popular, and likely the only politician capable of imposing his will on Haiti - if so inclined - Preval's role over the next 18 months is critical. Dealing with Preval is a challenge, occasionally frustrating and sometimes rewarding. He is wary of change and suspicious of outsiders, even those who seek his success. Managing Preval will remain challenging during the remainder of his term yet doing so is key to our success and that of Haiti. We must continue to find creative ways to work with him, influence him, and encourage him to recapture the activism of his first year in office. Until he does, political change and economic progress, so necessary to Haiti's future, is likely to be incremental at best.

The Politics of Personality  
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¶3. (C) Preval's attitude towards his presidency has been shaped by both experience and personality. As Aristide's Prime Minister and successor, he was overshadowed by the more charismatic ex-priest. At our first meeting, Preval recounted that he was "the last stop after Tabarre (where Aristide lived) when visitors came", bitterly reminding me that many USG visitors barely had time to see him when he was president. Those slights still rankle. A retiring, complex personality, the president shares little. His inner circle has greatly constricted during the past two years, with key advisors including Bob Manuel, all but dropping out. His involvement with his fiancée, financial advisor Babette Delatour has colored many of his other relationships, according to friends, and caused an estrangement of sorts with his sister and one of his daughters.

¶4. (C) Even those close to Preval concede that his chameleon-like character makes dealing with the president difficult. One close advisor calls it "the roller coaster that is Rene Preval." Personally engaging - even seductive - when he so wishes, Preval can be equally harsh with colleagues and others. Ministers, close advisors and others have felt the sting of his tongue, both in public and in private. Stubbornly holding to ideas long past their shelf life, he rarely welcomes dissenting opinions. His courting of Taiwan in 2006, which almost led to the Chinese blocking renewal of the MINUSTAH mandate in 2006, is a case in point. Preval is highly disinclined to delegate power or authority and even the smallest detail comes to his office for decision, a situation which has caused stress in his relationships with both his current and former prime ministers. Planning Minister Bellerive described to me a recent Cabinet meeting where the Prime Minister and the Cabinet presented a development plan for the long-suffering northern tier of the country. Preval ridiculed the idea and when confronted by a united ministerial front, walked out of the cabinet meeting and told his advisors to strike the proposal from the agenda.

¶5. (C) Uncomfortable in formal settings such as summits and international conferences, Preval seeks personal "relationships of trust" with his interlocutors. Often unable to articulate exactly what he wants - except in the

broadest of terms - Preval tends to view issues in black and white. Nonetheless, he expects a positive - and prompt response. That is particularly true of his dealings with the international community. He remains skeptical about the international community's commitment to his government's goals, for instance telling me that he is suspicious of how the Collier report will be used. He measures success with the international community - and the U.S.- in terms of positive response to his priorities, rather than according to some broader international benchmarks of success.

¶6. (C) Nevertheless, Preval's stubborn and cautious nature has sometimes borne fruit. In his first year in office, he was widely praised for reaching out to Haitians of all political stripes and for attempting to bridge Haiti's massive political divides. He has shrewdly coopted major political rivals into his personal cabinet over the past two years and has, through patient diplomacy managed to get fractious parliamentary groupings to sit around the table working on issues ranging from the budget to privatization to the current minimum wage crisis. He believes strongly that without his intercession, the international community would have ignored the impact of the 2008 hurricanes on Haiti, and that his early efforts at negotiation and discussion with the gangs of Cite Soleil (which he often reminds me that I criticized at the time) set the stage for the successful MINUSTAH operation to clear the area.

#### A Narrowing Circle?

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¶7. (C) Preval's seeming isolation in the palace during the past year is striking. Close friends report that they have little contact - and even less influence - with him. A businessman who was key to Preval's election said the last time that he talked to Preval, the president brushed him off. Shunning newspapers and radio, he has a friend in New York do a daily press summary for him; otherwise he freely admits that he neither reads nor listens to the news, either local or international. He uses one or two cell phones but rarely shares the numbers with his colleagues. He uses his email to communicate with family and close friends, but prefers to talk on the telephone. He seldom leaves the palace except to travel to his residence each evening and to the retreat he has bought for his fiancée in the mountains above Port au Prince.

#### The Health Issue

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¶8. (C) Preval's occasionally erratic behavior over the past year has again sparked widespread rumors that he is suffering from the effects of his past prostate cancer or that he has resumed drinking. There is no indication that he is taking medicine that affects his judgment or temperament, but he has ignored suggestions from his inner circle, including that of Delatour, that he do complete medical check-up in the U.S. He has not been to Cuba for follow-up tests in more than a year. Preval has increased his alcoholic consumption and often attends a Petionville night club with friends, but during our social interaction I have never seen him drink to excess. Nonetheless, reports of heavy drinking are circulating widely.

#### An Agenda deferred: Elections, Constitutional Reform, and Drugs

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¶9. (C) Preval has said that his agenda for his remaining years in office focuses on three interconnected issues: elections, constitutional reform, and drugs. He came late to the election issue, originally suggesting that the partial Senatorial elections be combined with the lower house polls scheduled for fall. He backed down in the face of international pressure, but also as he came to realize that he would have little success - or support - if he moved on

constitutional reform without a fully functioning senate. Given the delays in moving this election forward, he no longer believes that he will see an overhaul of the constitution. He now expects to focus on two critical constitutional issues, dual nationality and government decentralization. He has angrily denied charges that he manipulated the electoral process through the CEP and its decision to exclude Lavalas to undermine an already weak legislature.

¶10. (C) Preval's focus on comprehensive constitutional reform over the past year raised concerns about his ulterior motives. Many in Haiti's political class drew the conclusion that Preval was seeking a third term. The President's refusal to explicitly reject that possibility created confusion and uncertainty, but I view this development as highly unlikely. Nonetheless, concerns about Preval's intentions, coupled with deteriorating relations with parliament, and his cavalier treatment of major political parties has undermined consensus on constitutional reform and he seems now resigned to more limited changes.

¶11. (C) Preval's fixation on drug trafficking reflects both a growing frustration with the inflow of drugs into the country's political process and irritation that his government is unable to address something that could indeed pose a personal threat to his future after the presidency. Shunning all GOH responsibility for the problem, he looks to hand it over to us. He has yet to believe that we take his concerns seriously, and that has colored much of his dealings with us beyond the counternarcotics agenda.

#### A not-always-helpful world view

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¶12. (C) Although Preval's presidency started off well, with the new president reaching out across the political spectrum in an effort to create a new political culture in the country, those efforts have now essentially stalled. The President, whether by inclination or design, has not fully developed a vision of Haiti's future. By turns determined or distracted, Preval is often reluctant to use the levers of power given to him by the office of the presidency. In one telling instance, he held off going public in the April riots until the presidency appeared to hang in the balance. Skeptical of friends from abroad, and cynical about his own political class's ability to effect change, Preval believes that it is best only to speak out after the deals are done. Pressing him to be more expansive and communicative has been, in my experience, counterproductive. At the same time, he is reluctant to let anyone else pick up the slack, and as a result, the political vacuum in Haiti is often filled by those who do not necessarily have the nation's best interests at heart.

¶13. (C) There are those who argue that the April, 2008 riots so badly shook Preval's world view that he has become reluctant to act. We believe this is too simplistic an explanation. Preval was indeed unprepared for the riots in the street, but he used them to press some key objectives, including the removal of then-Prime Minister Jacques-Edouard Alexis. More to the point, I believe that the President's own style and outlook, his often unilateral decision-making style, his propensity to micromanage, and his essentially cynical (and often justified) view of the Haitian political process were, I believe, reinforced by what he saw in April, and he is looking for ways to ensure he is not caught unawares again.

¶14. (C) Preval's old friends suggest that in many ways he remains the radical student who broke with his conservative father and spent his university days in the political maelstrom of 1960s Europe. While this may overstate the case, Preval remains essentially a nationalist politician in the Haitian sense of the word - suspicious of outsiders intentions and convinced that no one understands Haiti like he does. He often takes actions, such as publicly dismissing

the results of the Washington Donors Conference or stalling elections, which could be construed as working at cross purposes with the U.S. Preval clearly believes that he can walk a fine line without losing U.S. or international community support. Here, however, he runs a risk. Although he briefly lived in the U.S., Preval does not truly understand Americans or the Washington policy environment - and he often ignores advisors who do.

#### The After-Life

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¶15. (C) Close friends speculate that many of Preval's actions during the past year - his rapprochement with Alexis and the Neptune faction of Lavalas, his obsession with constitutional reform, his anger over drug trafficker Guy Philippe, even his reactions to the April riots - stem from his very real fear that politics will prohibit him from returning to private life in Haiti after his presidency. Thus, they argue, his overriding goal is to orchestrate the 2011 presidential transition in such a way as to ensure that whoever is elected will allow him to go home unimpeded. Based on our conversations, this is indeed a matter that looms large for Preval. He has said to me on various occasions that he is worried about his life after the presidency, that he would not survive in exile. His concerns seem real, given Haiti's history, albeit somewhat overblown at this point in time.

#### What It Means for Us

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¶16. (C) Preval and I entered on duty in our respective positions at pretty much the same time and we have enjoyed an interesting, if not always harmonious, relationship during the past three and a half years. During that period, I have found him somewhat isolated, less open to ideas and advice, and more reluctant to use the tools of his office to advance his agenda than in his first year in office. Some say that he is reverting to the do-nothing persona of his first term as president. Like much about Preval, the reality is somewhat more complicated. What is clear to me, however, is that Preval has yet to truly provide the strong, consistent leadership that Haiti's current circumstances demand. In other places, we could find ways to circumvent or overcome these weaknesses. Not so in Haiti. Given Haiti's strong tradition of presidential rule, the blurred constitutional lines of authority, and his own reluctance to delegate authority, I believe that Preval - and only Preval - will continue to set the rhythm and scope of change in Haiti. And while we may argue with him about pace and priorities, we will have to adapt to his rhythm. Dealing with Preval has never been easy. Yet he remains Haiti's indispensable man and he must succeed in passing this country to a new leadership in 2011. We therefore must continue to find creative, consistent ways to reinforce and maintain our engagement - at all levels of the USG - with Preval and to press him to move forward the important agenda of change that remains as yet unrealized here.

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